

Where I'm From

Bethany Aslinger, Harlan County

I am from mountains and minnows,
chasing the creatures of the creek bed with reckless abandon.

I am from dandelion bracelets,
wrapped around tiny wrists
and knotted in golden hair.

I am from coal dust and counted blessings,
from the musty smell that lingered beneath the pews,
creeping into my skin while I napped,
wishing not to hear The Word preached.

I am from the scent of baby powder and strong perfume
as I rifled through my grandmother's cabinets.

I'm from crisp rain and rolling thunder,
bathing in the mountain runoff
to wash away sins of the summer heat
that made the cicadas sing.

I am from too quiet and too loud,
from stand up and sit back down,
from scraped knees and broken promises.

From the words my parents gave,
never kept,
and poured down the sink
like alcohol during revival and Revelations.

I'm from tribulation and trial,

from the freedom of gripping handlebars too tight
and singing songs to myself
as I danced alone.

I am from the calling and the falling out
of faith and family—
kites stuck in trees
flown from too-small hands.

I am from gravy and biscuit
cooked at night with tired eyes
and smiles.

I am from books devoured
and old lessons for a new soul,
learned too young.